

**THE PREVALENCE OF EXAMINATION MAL-PRACTICE IN SECONDARY
SCHOOL IN AKWA IBOM STATE: INVESTIGATING THE POSSIBLE WAYS
OF MINIMIZING IT BY SCHOOL COUNSELORS**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the prevalence of examination malpractice in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State and explored the possible ways school counselors can minimize the menace. Examination malpractice has become one of the most persistent challenges facing the educational system, threatening the credibility of academic assessments and the quality of education. The study reviewed the concept, prevalence, causes, effects, and prevention strategies of examination malpractice, with particular emphasis on the role of school counselors. Findings from the literature revealed that examination malpractice is highly prevalent in secondary schools and is manifested through cheating, impersonation, collusion, possession of unauthorized materials, question leakage, and the misuse of technological devices. The major causes identified include excessive emphasis on certificates, poor academic preparation, inadequate supervision during examinations, parental and peer pressure, and technological advancement. The study highlighted the strategic roles of school counselors in reducing examination malpractice through guidance and counseling services, value orientation, moral education, academic and career counseling, psycho-educational programs, study habit training, and collaboration with parents, teachers, and school administrators. It was concluded that school counselors remain critical stakeholders in promoting academic integrity and minimizing examination malpractice among secondary school students. The study recommended strengthening counseling services, enhancing ethical education, improving parental involvement, and enforcing examination regulations to curb the prevalence of examination malpractice in Akwa Ibom State secondary schools.

KEYWORDS: Examination Malpractice, School Counselors, Academic Integrity, Secondary Schools, Akwa Ibom State.

INTRODUCTION

Education is universally acknowledged as a crucial tool for social change, national development, and personal growth. People gain the



knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and skills required for meaningful engagement in society through education. Exams are a crucial part of the educational process since they are used to assess students' learning outcomes, track their academic progress, and certify their competency. The integrity and dependability of an educational system's testing procedures are crucial to its legitimacy. However, the increasing prevalence of examination malpractice has become a major threat to educational standards and academic excellence in Nigeria and other developing countries (Kaura 2020). Over the years, examination malpractice has evolved from isolated incidents to a widespread social problem affecting virtually all levels of education. The growing incidence of examination malpractice has raised serious concerns among educators, parents, policymakers, and examination bodies regarding the quality and credibility of educational qualifications.

Despite efforts by educational officials to stop the practice, reports of examination misconduct continue to surface in Akwa Ibom State and many other parts of Nigeria. Students in secondary school are under more and more strain from peer pressure, parental expectations, competition for academic performance, and society's emphasis on credentials rather than real skill. In order to obtain good grades and academic recognition, these pressures frequently encourage students to participate in dishonest examination procedures. Inadequate preparation, bad study habits, inadequate supervision, and the improper use of technology during exams all exacerbate the situation. As noted by Chukwudi and Chukwudi (2020), examination malpractice has evolved from isolated incidents to a systemic problem affecting the credibility of educational assessment.

In light of this, this study aims to assess the prevalence of test misconduct in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State and explore potential solutions for school counselors. It is anticipated that the study will offer insightful information that will help educators, legislators, counselors, and other stakeholders create practical plans for advancing academic integrity and raising standards.

Concept of Examination Mal-practices

Examination malpractice refers to any deliberate act of wrongdoing, misconduct, or irregular behavior by candidates, teachers, invigilators, examination officials, parents, or other stakeholders before, during, or after an examination with the intention of obtaining an unfair advantage or influencing examination results. It undermines the credibility, validity, and reliability of the assessment process and compromises the quality of education. Examination malpractice has become a major challenge confronting educational systems worldwide, particularly in developing



countries where competition for certificates and academic qualifications is intense. As noted by Kaura (2020), examination malpractice violates examination ethics and hinders the attainment of quality education by distorting the true assessment of learners' abilities.

Exam misconduct can take many different forms, such as bribery of exam authorities, electronic cheating, possession of prohibited materials, impersonation, collusion, leakage of exam questions, and score manipulation. These behaviors can take place at many points during the examination process, and they are frequently made possible by advances in technology and lax oversight. As noted by Osuji (2020), examination malpractice has evolved into sophisticated forms that threaten the effectiveness of educational assessment and make examinations less reliable as measures of students' academic achievement.

Exam misconduct has far-reaching negative effects on people and society as a whole. It results in graduates who lack the capability, knowledge, and abilities needed for advancement in the workplace and in society. Additionally, it adds to moral decay in society and undermines public trust in school credentials. As noted by Edun and Olorunmota (2024), examination malpractice is a social evil that undermines educational development and threatens the realization of national educational goals.

- **Prevalence of Examination Mal-practices**

Examination malpractice has become a widespread challenge in many educational systems across the world, particularly in developing countries where intense competition for academic success and employment opportunities places significant pressure on students. Examination malpractice refers to any deliberate act of wrongdoing before, during, or after an examination with the intention of obtaining an unfair advantage. Such practices include cheating, impersonation, collusion, leakage of examination questions, the use of unauthorized materials, and bribery of examination officials. As noted by Chukwudi and Chukwudi (2020), examination malpractice has evolved from isolated incidents to a systemic problem affecting the credibility of educational assessment.

The prevalence of examination malpractice has been linked to societal emphasis on certificates rather than actual knowledge and competence. In many educational institutions, students often perceive academic success as the primary pathway to social mobility, leading some to engage in dishonest practices to secure high grades. As noted by Omonijo (2021), the increasing occurrence of examination malpractice reflects broader societal values that prioritize academic credentials over genuine learning and skill acquisition.



Technological advancements have also contributed to the growing prevalence of examination malpractice. Mobile phones, smart devices, and internet-based communication platforms have created new opportunities for students to access unauthorized information during examinations. As noted by Akaranga and Ongong (2020), digital technologies have transformed traditional forms of cheating into more sophisticated methods that are difficult for examination authorities to detect and control effectively.

The prevalence of examination malpractice is evident across secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and professional certification examinations. Reports from educational authorities indicate recurring cases of examination irregularities despite the implementation of strict regulations and penalties. As noted by the examination integrity studies of recent years, the persistence of malpractice undermines public confidence in educational qualifications and compromises the quality of graduates entering the workforce.

Causes of Exams Mal-practices

- **Excessive Emphasis on Certificates**

The overvaluation of academic credentials over real knowledge and abilities is one of the main reasons for exam misconduct. When making decisions about enrollment, employment, and advancement, many organizations and businesses prioritize grades and certifications. As noted by Omonijo, Nnedum, and Chine (2021), this overemphasis on academic credentials creates pressure on students to obtain high grades by any means, including cheating during examinations.

- **Poor Academic Preparation**

Inadequate exam preparation increases the likelihood of malpractice by students. Students are frequently unprepared for exams due to poor study habits, laziness, absenteeism, and a lack of dedication to academic work. As noted by Akaranga and Ongong (2020), students who lack confidence in their academic ability frequently resort to examination malpractice as a means of avoiding failure and achieving desired results.

- **Inadequate Supervision During Examinations**

Students have the opportunity to cheat when there is insufficient supervision and monitoring during exams. Candidates may engage in many sorts of misconduct without being caught when invigilators neglect their responsibilities or when exam rooms are packed. As noted by Nwadiani (2020), inadequate supervision remains one of the most significant factors contributing to the persistence of examination malpractice in educational institutions.



- **Parental and Peer Pressure**

Excessive expectations placed on pupils by parents and classmates can indirectly encourage exam misconduct. While some peers encourage others to participate in dishonest behavior, some parents demand outstanding academic success regardless of their children's skills. As noted by Emaikwu (2021), the desire to satisfy parents, avoid ridicule, and gain acceptance among peers often motivates students to participate in examination malpractice.

- **Misuse of Technology**

Exam misconduct has become more likely due to the widespread use of technology devices like smartphones, smart watches, and internet-enabled devices. During exams, students can readily store information, interact with others, and obtain unapproved resources. As noted by Chukwudi and Chukwudi (2020), technological advancements have made examination malpractice more sophisticated, thereby posing serious challenges to examination authorities and educational institutions.

Effect of Exams Mal-practices

The following are effects of examination malpractice:

- **Poor Academic Performance**

Examination malpractice negatively affects students' academic performance because it encourages dependence on dishonest practices rather than genuine learning. Students who engage in cheating often pay less attention to studying, research, and classroom activities since they believe they can pass examinations through illegal means. As a result, they fail to acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies expected from their courses of study. This learning deficiency may become evident in higher educational levels and future careers where practical application of knowledge is required. Kumo, Abalaka, and Odili (2023) stated that examination malpractice weakens academic achievement and contributes to poor educational outcomes among students.

- **Production of Incompetent Graduates**

Examination malpractice leads to the production of graduates who lack the knowledge and practical skills required in their professions. Many students who rely on cheating may obtain certificates without mastering the subjects they studied. Consequently, such graduates may encounter difficulties in performing professional responsibilities effectively. This problem affects important sectors such as education, healthcare, engineering, and public



administration, where competence and expertise are essential. Okanezi and Eguzozie (2018) observed that examination malpractice contributes significantly to the emergence of unqualified manpower, thereby reducing productivity and professional efficiency.

- **Loss of Credibility of Educational Certificates**

The prevalence of examination malpractice reduces the credibility and value of educational certificates. When cheating becomes widespread, employers, educational institutions, and society may begin to doubt the authenticity of academic qualifications. This situation affects both dishonest and honest students because certificates issued by affected institutions may no longer be trusted. Furthermore, the reputation of schools and examination bodies can be damaged, leading to reduced confidence in the educational system. Abiodun-Oyebanji (2021) noted that examination malpractice poses a serious threat to quality assurance and the integrity of educational qualifications.

- **Moral Decadence and Unethical Behaviour**

Examination malpractice promotes dishonesty, corruption, and other unethical behaviours among students. Rather than encouraging hard work, discipline, and perseverance, it teaches students to seek shortcuts to success. Students who engage in examination malpractice may gradually develop a habit of dishonesty that extends beyond the school environment into their personal and professional lives. Such individuals may become involved in fraudulent practices, bribery, and corruption in the future. Okudo, Okwunolu, and Nwankwo (2023) found that examination malpractice is associated with negative academic behaviour and poor moral development among students.

- **Hindrance to National Development**

Examination malpractice hinders national development by producing a workforce that lacks the necessary competence to contribute meaningfully to economic and social progress. Every nation depends on skilled professionals and educated citizens to drive innovation, productivity, and development. However, when educational qualifications are obtained through dishonest means, the quality of human resources declines. This can result in poor service delivery, reduced productivity, and slow national growth. Bahago, Wokji, Bodams, and Fadipe (2023) emphasized that examination misconduct poses serious challenges to educational quality and national development by weakening the capacity of future workers and leaders.

Minimizing Strategies of Exams Mal-practices

Exam malpractice continues to be a significant problem in educational institutions, lowering students' moral standards, compromising academic



integrity, and diminishing the validity of credentials. Schools, municipalities, and testing organizations must implement thorough preventive measures to reduce this issue.

- **Use of technology-based examination systems.**

Using technology-based assessment methods is one such tactic. During exams, impersonation, question leaking, and copying are less common because of computer-based testing (CBT), biometric verification, CCTV surveillance, and plagiarism-detection software. Studies have shown that digital monitoring significantly decreases opportunities for cheating and enhances transparency in assessment processes (Adebayo & Olatunji, 2021).

- **Strengthening supervision and invigilation.**

Increasing supervision and invigilation is another crucial tactic. Adequate training for invigilators, sufficient deployment of examination officials, and strict adherence to examination laws can deter candidates from participating in malpractice. Effective supervision creates a perception of high risk, which reduces students' willingness to cheat (Eze & Nwankwo, 2022).

- **Promoting ethical education and counseling**

Encouraging ethical advice and instruction is also crucial. Students should routinely receive explanations about the repercussions of exam misconduct, including disciplinary proceedings, credential loss, and harm to future employment opportunities. Guidance and counseling programs can help students develop positive study habits, self-confidence, and academic honesty (Okafor et al., 2023).

- **Improving teaching and learning conditions**

Additionally, enhancing the educational environment might lessen the pressure that frequently prompts pupils to cheat. Providing qualified teachers, adequate instructional materials, and continuous assessment opportunities helps students prepare effectively for examinations and reduces overreliance on final examinations (Akinyemi & Adediran, 2020).

- **Strict enforcement of penalties**

Lastly, we must strictly enforce punishments. Examinees, invigilators, and officials engaged in malpractice should all be subject to consistent sanctions by examination organizations and institutions. Consistent punishment serves as a deterrent and reinforces the seriousness of academic misconduct (Umar & Yusuf, 2024).

School Counselors Roles of Minimizing Exams mal-practices

By encouraging academic integrity, addressing the root causes of cheating, and assisting students in developing good attitudes toward learning, school counselors play a critical role in lowering exam malpractice.



Counselors play a major role in fostering an environment that discourages dishonest examination techniques because they are professionals in charge of students' academic, personal, and social development.

- **providing guidance and counseling services**

Giving pupils advice and counseling is one of the main responsibilities of school counselors. Counselors assist students in managing exam anxiety, low self-esteem, fear of failing, and academic pressure—all of which are frequently linked to exam malpractice—through individual and group counseling sessions. By teaching effective study habits, time management skills, and stress-coping strategies, counselors enable students to prepare adequately for examinations without resorting to dishonest means (Adebisi & Ojo, 2021).

- **value orientation and moral education**

Additionally, school counselors participate in moral teaching and value orientation. To inform students about the moral ramifications and repercussions of exam misconduct, they host lectures, workshops, and awareness campaigns. Such programs encourage honesty, responsibility, and self-discipline, helping students appreciate the importance of earning academic success through legitimate efforts (Eze & Nwosu, 2022).

- **career and academic counseling**

Academic and career advising is another crucial function. Counselors help students define reasonable goals for their education and careers, which lessens the overwhelming pressure to get good grades at any costs. When students understand that long-term success depends on competence rather than examination scores alone, they are less likely to engage in cheating behaviors (Okeke, 2023).

Strategic Methods used by School Counselors in Minimizing Exams Malpractices

School counselors play a vital role in curbing academic dishonesty by addressing the cognitive, emotional, and social drivers that lead students to cheat. Below are the key strategic methods utilized by school counselors to minimize examination malpractice:

- **Implementation of Psychoeducation Groups and Behavioral Modeling**

School counselors utilize psychoeducation groups to systematically cultivate a culture of academic integrity and structurally dismantle the internal mechanisms that justify cheating. By forming targeted counseling groups, counselors employ behavioral modeling techniques—such as displaying video-based case studies of students navigating academic pressures honestly—to

encourage observational learning (Sutoyo, Nugroho & Sunawan, 2023). In the end, this cooperative group dynamic lessens the prevalence of overt exam fraud and cheating by assisting students in creating constructive behaviors, exercising moral self-control, and fending off peer pressure.

- **Proactive Guidance Sessions and Consequences Sensitization**

The planning and implementation of regular, proactive assistance and counseling sessions with the goal of changing students' attitudes toward exams is another crucial strategy. School counselors systematically educate the entire student body on the internal regulations governing exams as well as the wider social and psychological repercussions of malpractice, as opposed to just stepping in when a violation happens. Bolu-Steve et al. (2023) explained that by highlighting how cheating distorts personal development and compromises future professional competency, these sessions realign student expectations, strengthen compliance, and significantly lower the intent to participate in malpractice.

- **Collaborative Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) Advisory Alliances**

School counselors build structured collaborative alliances with parents through regular PTA consultative forums to dismantle systemic external pressures. Recognizing that parental anxiety and unrealistic grade expectations are major environmental catalysts for exam malpractice, counselors use these alliances to educate parents on healthier motivational practices and the psychological hazards of bribing invigilators or buying leaked papers (Alutu & Aluede, 2015).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, examination malpractice remains one of the most serious threats to the achievement of quality education in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria at large. The study has established that examination malpractice is highly prevalent among students and manifests in various forms, including cheating, impersonation, collusion, examination leakage, possession of unauthorized materials, and the misuse of technology. The persistence of these unethical practices is largely attributed to factors such as excessive emphasis on certificates, poor academic preparation, inadequate supervision, parental and peer pressure, and the increasing availability of technological devices that facilitate cheating. Therefore, minimizing examination malpractice requires a collaborative effort involving counselors, teachers, parents, school administrators, examination bodies, and government agencies. Consequently, the educational system will be

strengthened, and the credibility of academic qualifications will be preserved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. School counselors should intensify guidance and counseling services by organizing regular individual and group counseling sessions aimed at addressing examination anxiety, fear of failure, poor study habits, and academic pressure among students.
2. Counselors should conduct continuous moral and value-orientation programs to educate students on the dangers and consequences of examination malpractice and the importance of honesty, integrity, and hard work.
3. Secondary schools should organize study-skills and time-management workshops to help students develop effective learning habits and improve their academic confidence without resorting to cheating.



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